United Nations A/C.5/62/SR.34

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
16 May 2008

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 34th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 17 March 2008, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Ali. . . . . (Malaysia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Ms. McLurg

Contents

Agenda item 128: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 (*continued*)

Revised estimates relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 under section 1, Overall policymaking, direction and coordination, section 3, Political affairs, section 28D, Office of Central Support Services and section 35, Staff assessment, related to the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

08-27957 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 128: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 (*continued*)

Revised estimates relating to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 under section 1, Overall policymaking, direction and coordination, section 3, Political affairs, section 28D, Office of Central Support Services and section 35, Staff assessment, related to the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs (continued) (A/62/7/Add.32 and A/62/521 and Corr.1; A/C.5/62/24 and A/C.5/62/25)

1. **Mr. Bui The Giang** (Viet Nam) said that the Secretariat, in its efforts to strengthen the Department of Political Affairs, should pay attention to the need to ensure cost-effectiveness, balanced gender and geographical composition of the Department's divisions, and compliance with mandates conferred by the General Assembly.

2. While the establishment of regional offices had a role to play in strengthening the Department of Political Affairs, his delegation had concerns regarding the idea of opening a regional office in South-East Asia. South-East Asia was generally politically stable, and the countries of the region had proved capable of effectively and efficiently handling their political affairs. It would be better to see the strengthening of the Department focus on building mechanisms for closer coordination with the countries and existing institutions of the region, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

3. Moreover, without prejudging the outcome of discussions on the Secretary-General's proposals for strengthening the Department, and in view of the Organization's growing responsibilities and financial burden, it would be more appropriate for the funds intended for a regional office of the Department to be used to help better satisfy the development needs of the countries of the region. His delegation welcomed the assurance of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs that regional offices of the Department would be opened only at the request of the host country and all others in the region, on the basis of an appropriate mandate. Should there be a need for such a regional presence, a transparent and inclusive process of consultation would be required before an informed decision could be made at both the national and regional levels.

4. **Mr. Torres Lépori** (Argentina) said that the time was right, and the arguments compelling, to improve the Organization's capacity for preventive diplomacy. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee provided a good basis for the necessary strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs. The capacity of the Department's Electoral Assistance Division particularly needed improvement to ensure that it could cope with the increasing demand for its services.

5. Turning to the proposed reorganization of the Department's regional divisions, he said that his delegation could see no justification for establishing an Americas Division split into a Central America/Mexico Section, an Andean Section, a Caribbean Section and a North America/Southern Cone Section. For reasons explained at the previous meeting by the representative of Mexico, speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, the aims of the strengthening exercise would be better served by establishing a South America section within the Americas Division. Such a section should be staffed by individuals from the countries concerned, as they would have the best understanding of the political and social realities involved. The Department in general, and the potential South America section in particular, should pursue a geographical and gender balance among staff.

6. The Department should exploit the existing capacities of regional and subregional organizations. Any problems that arose in the region should be referred first to those organizations. Recalling that the Secretary-General had pointed out that peace, security and development were mutually reinforcing, he said that the proposed strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs should be seen as part of an overall reform effort which included the Organization's development activities.

7. **Mr. Sena** (Brazil) said that his delegation supported the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs, recognizing the need to improve the Organization's capacity in conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and electoral assistance, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

8. His delegation subscribed to the views expressed by the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement on the subject of the proposals for strengthening the

Department, which included concerns regarding the lack of prior consultation of the Member States, the submission to the Fifth Committee — a technical body — of a report containing political considerations, the need for Member States' consent to the establishment of regional offices of the Department and the inaccurate portrayal of Latin America, particularly the Andean subregion.

9. More specifically, his delegation believed that, as history had frequently demonstrated, the region had the collective means and institutions to deal effectively with political problems. The Department should therefore support the existing mechanisms. Moreover, preventive diplomacy and good offices could not succeed in the region without efforts to address underdevelopment and to combat hunger and poverty.

10. His delegation also subscribed to the view, already explained at the previous meeting by the representative of Mexico speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, that the proposed reorganization of the Department's regional structure was inappropriate in the case of Latin America. His delegation wished consultations to begin on the establishment of sections for North America, South America and Central America/Caribbean.

11. The work of the proposed Americas Division should focus on cooperation with a network of regional organizations, as the Advisory Committee had recommended in its report (A/62/7/Add.32). His delegation remained unconvinced of the need, benefits or relevance of a regional office of the Department in Latin America, a proposal which did not enjoy the full support of the region's Member States.

12. The Department of Political Affairs should play an important role in Haiti, the only country in the region on the agenda of the Security Council. Working in conjunction with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs could make a crucial contribution to consolidating development and institution-building in the interest of preventing recurring crises.

13. The Department should establish appropriate mechanisms for consultation with regional and subregional organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, including the Organization of American States, to make the most of available capacities. It should also make an effort to employ more staff from the region in order to profit from their direct knowledge and understanding of its political, economic and social realities.

14. **Mr. Pitranto** (Indonesia) said that his delegation shared the views and concerns raised by other States members of ASEAN regarding the proposal to establish regional offices of the Department of Political Affairs, underscoring the need to consult and obtain the consent and agreement of countries in the region before such offices were set up, as explained in the letter addressed to the Secretary-General by the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement (A/C.5/62/24).

15. In the light of the Organization's resource constraints, it would be prudent to prioritize the development of the Department's preventive diplomacy and mediation capacities in regions where they were most needed. The Department should also pursue synergy with existing regional preventive diplomacy efforts. Taking South-East Asia as an example, he indicated that ASEAN had taken significant steps to prevent emerging conflicts, and was further developing its abilities in that regard through the goal of establishing an ASEAN Security Community. It had also stimulated similar work in other regions, for example through the ASEAN Regional Forum. Any possible future development of the Department's regional preventive diplomacy capacity in South-East Asia should be in synergy with those existing and fast-developing ASEAN capacities.

16. **Mr. Tawana** (South Africa) said that his delegation, agreeing that prevention was better than cure, supported the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs to make it better able to effectively and efficiently undertake conflict prevention, mediation and electoral assistance efforts, especially in Africa. However, the concerns about the reform proposals expressed by a number of delegations should be respected, and the work of the Department should complement that of other United Nations entities, without duplication. The principle of equitable geographical distribution in the recruitment of staff should also be adhered to.

17. **Mr. Debabeche** (Algeria) said that his delegation deeply regretted that the report before the Committee had been introduced in its current form. As was clear from the observations made by a number of delegations, there was no general agreement on the proposals it contained. It was no surprise that the most

ardent proponents of the reform measures in question, unwilling to supply the necessary funds, wished to draw on existing resources in the hope that mandate reform would generate savings to make up the deficit, to the detriment of resources for development and humanitarian efforts.

18. Comments had also been made on the Secretariat's piecemeal approach to reform, which would cause the budget for the biennium 2008-2009 to swell by some $1 billion, on the risks of duplication, and on the failure to anticipate possible synergies and rationalization of the work of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and entities promoting development.

19. While his delegation took issue more with the form than the content of the report, the matters under discussion went beyond the prevention of conflict, which was being brandished as a distraction in the knowledge that no Member State would be opposed to it because it underpinned the very rationale of the Organization.

20. The answer could only be found by asking other troublesome questions which confronted the lack of rigour in the Committee's work, which was becoming increasingly politicized. The Joint Coordinating Committee of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement had pointed out that phenomenon and called for consultation to secure a mandate before the matter returned to the Fifth Committee to obtain the necessary financial resources. Despite its logic, that approach had not been adopted.

21. Moreover, the wish of the largest group of States in the General Assembly to see a corrigendum to the report of the Secretary-General issued had not been acted upon, even though one corrigendum already existed. The path which the Secretariat had followed raised the question of why it appeared to have a new strategy of evading a transparent, democratic debate, as had already occurred with the establishment of the post of Special Adviser "on the responsibility to protect", in order to impose particular concepts or reform measures through the simple expedient of budget allocations.

22. That trend would only serve to create a worse credibility gap, arouse suspicion as to the genuine motivation for any and all Secretariat reform proposals and cause an entire group of States to distance itself from such proposals. His delegation therefore shared the reservations of the Advisory Committee and looked forward to an additional report defining the mandates and terms of reference for the reform in question. In future, the Fifth Committee should not be manipulated for political ends, and should confine itself to its proper responsibilities.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.